

Message Text

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ACTION RP-10

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INR-10 NSAE-00 PA-01 ICA-11 DODE-00 /062 W

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FM AMCONSULATE PESHAWAR

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 566

INFO AMEMBASSY KABUL

AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

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E.O. 12065: N/A

TAGS: SREF, PEPR, PINS, PK, AF

SUBJECT: AFGHAN REFUGEES IN NWFP

1. THE TOTAL NUMBER OF AFGHAN REFUGEES IN PAKISTAN IS NOW APPROACHING 400,000. MOST OF THEM ARE IN NORTH-WEST FRONTIER PROVINCE (NWFP) OF WHICH PESHAWAR IS THE CAPITAL. I CALLED ON NWFP COMMISSIONER FOR AFGHAN REFUGEES, MR. SHAMSHER, ON DEC. 16 FOR UPDATE ON REFUGEE SITUATION. THE NEWLY-ASSIGNED SHAMSHER, WHOM I HAD NOT MET BEFORE, WAS MOST OPEN AND HELPFUL AND APPEARED TO BE ON TOP OF THE JOB. HIS PREVIOUS ASSIGNMENTS AS ADMINISTRATOR IN SEVERAL LOCATIONS IN THE NWFP AND BALUCHISTAN, INCLUDING DEPUTY COMMISSIONER IN PESHAWAR AND POLITICAL AGENT IN THE MARRI-BUGTI HILLS, WOULD SEEM TO BE GOOD PREPARATION FOR THE JOB. WE DISCUSSED THE FOLLOWING:

2. NUMBERS: ACCORDING TO SHAMSHER, THERE WERE THEN 297,052 REGISTERED AFGHAN REFUGEES IN NWFP. THE BALANCE OF PAKISTAN'S 350,00-PLUS REGISTERED REFUGEES WERE IN BALUCHISTAN. IN ADDITION, HOWEVER,

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THERE WERE PROBABLY A MINIMUM OF 10 TO 15 PERCENT MORE WHO WERE NOT REGISTERED, MANY OF WHOM WERE IN OUT-OF-THE-WAY PLACES, OR WHO HAD MOVED INTO PUNJAB OR SIND PROVINCES. A COMPLICATING FACTOR ARE THE BOWINDAHS (CALLED KUCHIS IN AFGHANISTAN). THESE TRANS-PASTORALISTS FROM THE PATHAN GHILZAI TRIBE HAVE CROSSED WITH THEIR FLOCKS INTO PAKISTAN IN THE COLD

WEATHER FOR CENTURIES. THIS YEAR, SHAMSHER THINKS, MORE THAN 50,000 HAVE COME, IN ADDITION TO REFUGEES. OTHER OBSERVERS SUGGEST HIS ESTIMATE OF POWINDAH NUMBERS MAY BE LOW; CLEARLY, MORE HAVE ENTERED PAKISTAN THIS YEAR THAN IN ANY OF THE PAST 20 YEARS, AND MANY POWINDAHS ARE TRYING TO REGISTER AS REFUGEES TO AVAIL OF BENEFITS. HOWEVER, GOP RESISTS POWINDAH REGISTRATION AND TRIES TO TABULATE THE GROUPS SEPARATELY.

3. WHERE? REFUGEES ARE LOCATED IN MOST DISTRICTS OF NWFP, BUT MOST ARE IN THE TRIBAL AGENCIES WHICH TOUCH THE DURAND LINE. THE BREAKDOWN BY DISTRICT, AGENCY OR CAMP, PROVIDED BY SHAMSHER, IS AS FOLLOWS;

DISTRICT:

CHITRAL	6,100
DIR	4,644
MARDAN	3,551
D.I. KHAN	2,549
KOHAT	20,016
PESHAWAR	53,103

TRIBAL AGENCIES:

BAJAUR	25,903
MOHMAND	3,005

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KHYBER	1,956
KURRAM	62,422
N. WAZIRISTAN	96,968
S. WAZIRISTAN	10,677

ORGANIZED CAMPS:

CHITRAL	800
WARSAK	1,768
GANDAF	1,811
DARGAI	1,248

4. WHO? THE GOP HAS NOT COMPLETED A CENSUS TO DETERMINE WHO THE REFUGEES ARE, SHAMSHER SAID, BUT ONE IS IN PROGRESS. THE COMMISSIONER REPEATED WHAT MANY OTHER OBSERVERS HAVE SAID, I.E. THAT MANY REFUGEES ARE FROM TRIBES WHO ARE DIVIDED BY THE DURAND LINE. IT SEEMS CLEAR TO ME THAT ALMOST ALL ARE PATHANS; ALMOST ALL THE MALE REFUGEES ONE SEES WEAR THE LONG TURBANS AND THE HAWK-LIKE FACES OF THE PATHANS. THERE ARE ALMOST NO CENTRAL ASIAN FACES WHICH ONE WOULD IDENTIFY AS HAZARAS OR TURKOMEN, IN THE CROWD. AMONG MIDDLE CLASS, URBAN-

DWELLING REFUGEES, THERE ARE MANY DARI SPEAKERS,
BUT THIS CATEGORY CONSTITUTES A VERY SMALL PERCENTAGE
OF THE TOTAL, PERHAPS ONE TWO OR THREE PERCENT. IN
CHITRAL, THERE ARE SOME NURISTANIS, BUT IN THE TOTAL
REFUGEE MIX THEY ARE FEW.

5. CAMPS: AS NOTED ABOVE, FEW OF THE REFUGEES ARE
IN WHAT THE GOP CONSIDERS PROPER "CAMPS". ONLY FOUR
ARE BEING UTILIZED - THE UNDER-CONSTRUCTION HOSPITAL
IN CHITRAL WHICH CODEL WOLFE VISITED - IT HOLDS ONLY
A FEW HUNDRED PERSONS; GANDAF, A FORMER WORK CAMP FOR
TARBELLA DAM ON THE INDUS; WARSAK, ANOTHER FORMER WORK
CAMP, FOR A DAM OF THE SAME NAME IN PESHAWAR DISTRICT;
AND DARGAI, A FORMER MILITARY FORT IN MALAKAND AGENCY.
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NOTICEABLE TO TRAVELLERS ON THE GRAND TRUNK ROAD
EAST OF HERE IS AN INFORMAL CAMP AT ASA KHEL, NEAR
NOWSHER. AN ENCAMPMENT OF TENTS AND GRASS SHELTERS
HAS GROWN UP ON A BROAD, INFERTILE FIELD WHERE THE
GOP DISTRIBUTED TENTS TO ATTRACT REFUGEES AWAY FROM
PESHAWAR. ACCORDING TO SHAMSHER, HIS GOVERNMENT WILL
CONTINUE TO USE THIS PRACTICE TO LURE REFUGEES TO
SITES OF ITS CHOICE.

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EARLIER, IT FAILED IN ATTEMPTING TO MOVE SIGNIFICANT NUMBERS OF REFUGEES INTO THE FOUR CAMPS MENTIONED ABOVE.

6. CONCENTRATION IN CAMPS AND AWAY FROM THE BORDER HAD BEEN A SINE QUA NON OF UNHCR ASSISTANCE. THE ORGANIZATION HAS TRIED TO AVOID POSSIBLE CRITICISM THAT ITS FORTHCOMING AID WOULD NOT BE DIVERTED TO THE AFGHAN GUERRILLAS, MANY OF WHOM REGARD THE NWFP AS A STAGING AREA FOR THEIR FORAYS ACROSS THE BORDER. THE REALITIES OF THE SITUATION HAVE APPARENTLY LED UNHCR TO SOFTEN ITS DEMANDS. ACCORDING TO SHAMSHER, THE BODY NOW RECOGNIZES THE DIFFICULTIES IN TRYING TO MOVE THE REFUGEES, MANY OF WHOM HAVE THEIR FLOCKS WITH THEM, VERY FAR AWAY FROM THE BORDER. HENCE, SUCH CENTERS FOR REFUGEES AS PARACHINAR IN KURRUM, WHICH IS ONLY 10 MILES FROM THE DURAND LINE, WILL BE ACCEPTABLE TO UNHCR AS DISTRIBUTING CENTERS FOR ASSISTANCE.

7. REFUGEE CONDITIONS: ALMOST BY DEFINITION, REFUGEE LIFE IS NEVER GOOD, AND CERTAINLY CONDITIONS FOR THE AFGHAN REFUGEES ARE TOUGH. STILL, THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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SITUATION IS NOT DESPERATE. FIRST, MOST OF THESE ARE VERY TOUGH PEOPLE WHO HAVE ALWAYS LIVED IMPOVERISHED LIVES CLOSE TO THE ELEMENTS. MANY PROBABLY SPENT A GOOD PART OF EACH YEAR IN RUDE HUTS WHILE TENDING THEIR FLOCKS AND HERDS IN THE HILLS. SECONDLY, MANY HAVE BEEN ABLE TO BRING TENTS, BLANKETS AND OTHER COMFORTS WITH THEM. REFUGEES ARE PRESENTLY LIVING CROWDED INTO THESE TENTS OR THOSE PROVIDED BY THE GOP, OR TENTS PURCHASED HERE. OTHERS BUILD RUDE GRASS OR BRUSH SHELTERS. OTHERS HAVE HOUSES OR APARTMENTS WITH RELATIVES, FRIENDS OR PAKISTANI CO-TRIBESMEN. A LUCKY FEW OF THE MORE AFLUENT HELP DRIVE UP ALREADY HIGH PESHAWAR RENTS BY TAKING THEIR OWN PLACES. STILL, THERE ARE MANY REFUGEES WHO DO NOT HAVE ANY SHELTER FROM THE ELEMENTS. PROBABLY, THEY NUMBER IN THE TENS OF THOUSANDS. ACCORDING TO SHAMSHER, THE RECENT REFUGEES, WHO FLED FROM AFGHANISTAN ARMY ASSULTS IN PAKTIA IN OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER, BROUGHT LESS WITH THEM THAN DID THEIR PREDECESSORS.

6. IN THIS WINTER SEASON, LOW TEMPERATURES RANGE FROM FREEZING IN PESHAWAR (1,000 FT) TO BELOW ZERO AS ONE ASCENDS THE HILLS (PARACHIN) IS ABOUT

5,000 FT., THE LOWEST SNOW LINE ABOUT 3,000); SHELTER AND BLANKETS ARE NECESSARY, INDEED, AND THOSE WHO LACK ONE OR THE OTHER MUST SUFFER. LAST WINTER, THERE WERE ACCOUNTS OF SCORES OF CHILDREN DYING IN THE SNOWS WHILE CROSSING THE HIGH PASSES OUT OF NURISTAN, AND ONE SOURCE CLAIMS THAT THERE HAVE BEEN SIMILAR DEATHS THIS YEAR.

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9. THE MOST PRESSING REFUGEE NEED, ACCORDING TO SHAMSHER, IS FOR TENTS. BASED ON AN OCCUPANCY RATE OF 5 PER CENT, HE WOULD NEED 60,000 TENTS TO HOUSE 300,000 PERSONS THEN IN NWFP. PRESENTLY, HALF THAT NUMBER HAVE BEEN PROVIDED FOR: 20,000 FROM UNHCR, 8,000 FROM THE GOP AND 1,000 FROM THE GOVERNMENT OF KUWAIT. OF THESE, THOUGH, ONLY 3,000 HAVE ACTUALLY GOTTEN INTO THE HANDS OF THE REFUGEES SO FAR.

10. FOOD: MUCH OF THE REFUGEES' SUSTENANCE TO DATE HAS BEEN PROVIDED BY A FOUR RUPEE (RS. 10-\$1) PER DIEM PER HEAD MAINTENANCE ALLOWANCE FROM THE GOP. THIS IS INTENDED TO PERMIT PURCHASE BASIC FOODSTUFFS- WHOLE WHEAT FLOUR, COOKING OIL AND SUGAR. ACCORDING TO SHAMSHER, THE GOP TRIES TO ENSURE THAT THESE STAPLES ARE IN ADEQUATE SUPPLY IN GOVERNMENT CONTROLLED RATION SHOPS IN AREAS WHERE REFUGEES CONGREGATE. IN SOME INSTANCES, HE SAYS, REFUGEES HAVE BEEN LICENSED TO OPEN RATION SHOPS.

11. NONETHELESS, THE SYSTEM IS NOT WORKING WELL BECAUSE THE GOP IS WAY BEHIND ON MAKING MAINTENANCE PAYMENTS. IN MANY INSTANCES, ENROLLED REFUGEES HAVEN'T BEEN PAID SINCE OCTOBER, IN OTHER AS LONG AGO AS AUGUST. FROM THIS, ONE MUST ASSUME THAT NEW REFUGEES HAVE NOT YET COLLECTED ANYTHING. IF PAYMENTS ARE NOT COMING, THEN HOW DO THE REFUGEES EAT? SOME SUBSIST, SHAMSHER SAYS, BY CAREFULLY DOLING OUT FUNDS EARLIER RECEIVED. OTHERS SPEND WHAT MONEY THEY BROUGHT WITH THEM, OR SELL POSSESSIONS, INCLUDING LIVESTOCK. STILL OTHERS ARE EMPLOYED LOCALLY.

12. WFP: SOME FOOD WILL SOON BE FORTHCOMING THROUGH THE WORLD FOOD PROGRAM (WFP). I TALKED WITH WFP
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ADVISER J.B. BURATHOKI ON DECEMBER 17. BURATHOKI, A NEPALESE, WAS IN PESHAWAR TO DISCUSS ACCOUNTING TECHNIQUES WITH THE DEPUTY COMMISSIONERS AND POLITICAL AGENTS WHO WILL BE OVERSEEING THE PROGRAM. HE SAID A QUANTITY OF DRIED MILK HAS ALREADY ARRIVED IN NWFP. IN ADDITION, ABOUT 8,000 TONS OF THE 13,000 TONS OF WHEAT PLANNED FOR THE PROGRAM IS EXPECTED SOON. FURTHER, WFP IS EXCHANGING SOME WHEAT (AT 2 FOR QL FOR OVER 1,000 TONS OF PULSES WHICH WILL BE DISTRIBUTED IN THE PROGRAM. THE OTHER PROGRAM COMPONENT IS 1,000 TONS OF VEGETABLE OIL. WFP HOPES TO BEGIN FOOD DISTRIBUTION IN MIN-JANUARY.

13. ACCORDING TO BURATHOKI, WFP NEEDS FUNDS FOR IN-COUNTRY TRANSPORTATION OF FOOD. THESE WOULD PAY COST OF CARRIAGE FROM PORT OF KARACHI TO NWFP AND CERTAIN OTHER COSTS, SUCH AS AIRLIFT OF FOOD TO SNOW-BLOCKED CHITRAL.

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14. HEALTH: THERE ARE FEW PROGRAMS THAT I KNOW OF AIMED SPECIFICALLY AT HELPING THEM. THE PAK RED CRESCENT SOCIETY DOES PROVIDE A BIT OF ASSISTANCE AND AT LEAST ONE CLINIC - ORGANIZED BY AMCIT ZIA NASSRY - HAS SPRUNG UP TO MEET THEIR NEEDS. MORE IMPORTANTLY, THE PAK PRIVATE MEDICAL SECTOR IS AVAILABLE TO THOSE WHO HAVE MEANS AND

GOVERNMENT HOSPITALS TO EVERYONE WHO CAN BE ACCOMMODATED. AFGHAN USE OF PAK MEDICAL FACILITIES LONG PREDATES THE INSURRECTION. PESHAWAR HAS BEEN THE MEDICAL CENTER FOR MUCH OF EASTERN AFGHANISTAN FOR YEARS. NOW, A SURPRISING PERCENTAGE OF HOSPITAL BEDS ARE OCCUPIED BY AFGHANS. THE HEAD OF ORTHOPEDICS AT KHYBER TEACHING HOSPITAL TOLD ME DEC. 23 THAT ABOUT 40 PERCENT OF HIS WORK IS WITH AFGHANS, MOST OF WHOM HAVE SHOT OR SHELL WOUNDS, INCLUDING WOMEN AND CHILDREN.

15. EMPLOYMENT:: LIFE FOR SOME REFUGEES HERE IS EASED BY LOCAL EMPLOYMENT AS AGRICULTUREL AND CONSTRUCION, LABORERS. THE FORMER, ESPECIALLY, HAS DRAWN AFGHANS HERE IN COLD WEATHER FOR YEARS. LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ACCORDING TO COMMISSIONER SHAMSHER, THOUGH, ONLY ABOUT 5 PERCENT OF THE REFUGEES ARE GAINFULLY EMPLOYED. HE SAYS THAT MOST JOBS GO TO THE POWINDAHS WHO HAVE TRADITIONALLY DONE THEM. A HANDFUL OF AFGHANS IS WORKING AS TRANSPORTERS. THE GOP HAS ISSUED TEMPORARY ROAD PASSES TO THE OWNERS OF ABOUT 100 TRUCKS AND BUSES, WHICH ONE SEES PLYING THE ROADS HERE.

16. RELATIONS WITH PAKISTANIS: TO DATE, RELATIONS BETWEEN THE REFUGEES AND THEIR HOSTS HAVE BEEN QUITE GOOD. THE TURI TRIBESMEN OF PARACHINAPIIN KURRUM AGENCY, WHO ARE SHIA MUSLIMS, HAVE FELT AT ODDS WITH THE SUNNI REFUGEES, WHOSE ARRIVAL HAS UPSET THE LOCAL SUNNI SHIA BALANCE, BUT LITTLE VIOLENCE, IF ANY HAS ERUPTED. INDEED, MY BEST TURI CONTACT, AFTER GRUMBLING TO ME ABOUT REFUGEES FOR A YEAR, TOLD ME LAST WEEK THAT ALL IS WELL. THERE IS SOME GROUSING IN PESHAWAR ABOUT SUPPOSEDLY RICH REFUGEES WHO LIVE TOO WELL, BUT IT APPEARS NOT TO BE IMPORTANT. ALL IN ALL, THE PAKS SEEM TO TAKE SERIOUSLY THEIR OFTEN STATED OBLIGATIONS TO THEIR AFGHAN BY WHERS. THAT MOST NWFP RESIDENTS ARE FELLOW PUSHTO SPEAKERS AND OFTEN CO-TRIBESMEN MAKES THIS EASIER.

17. MISERY SCALE: THE SITUATION FOR AFGHAN REFUGEES IS FRAUGHT WITH MISERY. A HONG KONG-BASED NEWSWEEK REPORTER NAMED PRINGLE TELLS US THAT THE EFFECTS OF MALUTRITION HE HAS JUST WITNESSED AT ASA KHEL SEEMED AS BAS AS THOSE HE HAD SEEN AMONG CAMBODIAN REFUGEES. HE WILL PROBABLY SO REPORT. MY OWN IMPRESSIONS, THOUGH, ARE THAT CONDITIONS ARE NOT ANYWHERE NEAR AS BAD AS PRINGLE'S FINDING.

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BEFORE WE HEARD FROM PRINGLE, MY ASSISTANT, MASOOD
AKRAM, AND I HAD TRIED TO COMPARE THE TWO GROUPS.
ON A ZERO TO THEN SUFFERING SCALE, WITH CAMBODIAN
REFUGEES AT 10, WE WOULD SET AFGHAN REFUGEES AT 4
OR 5. IT SHOULD BE NOTED, THOUGH, THAT I HAVE
ACTUALLY VISITED ONLY ONE REFUGEE CAMP.
ARCHARD

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